



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

DANNEL P. MALLOY
GOVERNOR

Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D
COMMISSIONER

Testimony by Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services
Before the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee

Good afternoon Chairpersons Duff and Janowski, Ranking Members Kane and Buck-Taylor and the other distinguished members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I am Miriam Delphin-Rittmon, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. It is an honor to be nominated by Governor Malloy to serve as Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, a health care agency that provides services throughout Connecticut to over 110 thousand individuals with psychiatric and substance use disabilities on an annual basis. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before your committee today.

I would like to begin my remarks by thanking Governor Malloy for nominating me for this position and then share a bit of background information with you about myself.

I received my bachelor degree in social science from Hofstra University in 1989, my doctorate in clinical psychology from Purdue University in 2001, and completed a post-doctoral fellowship in clinical community psychology at Yale University in 2002. Since this time I have been a faculty member with the Program for Recovery and Community Health in the Yale Department of Psychiatry of the School of Medicine. I have worked as a clinician at the Connecticut Mental Health Center in New Haven where my responsibilities included providing outpatient individual and group therapy to individuals with serious and persistent mental illness and addiction disorders. I also provided clinical supervision to pre-doctoral clinical psychology interns.

Since 2002, I also held the position of Director of Cultural Competency and Health Disparities Research and Consultation with the Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health where I have consulted with national, state, and local organizations on system design and service delivery strategies for promoting person centered, culturally responsive, and recovery-oriented care for individuals with mental health disorders and addictions.

I have worked with DMHAS since 2002 through the DMHAS/Yale University partnership. My work with the Department began as a trainer with the DMHAS Recovery Institute, a statewide training initiative designed to promote recovery oriented and culturally responsive care among

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DMHAS state and private non-profit providers. Since this time I have worked on a range of policy initiatives including as an evaluator of the CT DMHAS Transformation Grant, and consultant on the DMHAS Health Disparities Initiative which has received national recognition from the National Alliance on Mental Illness. I have held various roles at DMHAS including Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Senior Policy Advisor, and most recently, Deputy Commissioner.

In May 2014, I completed a two year White House appointment working as a Senior Advisor to the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) with the Department of Health and Human Services. While at SAMHSA, I worked on a range of policy initiatives addressing behavioral health equity, workforce development, and healthcare reform.

I have also served as the Interim Executive Co-Director of the National Leadership Council on African American Behavioral Health, Inc. (NLC) and currently serve on CT Commission on Health Equity.

During my time at DMHAS I have worked in partnership with individuals in recovery, families, advocacy groups, and service providers to ensure that individuals have a meaningful life in the community. My work has focused on the identification of healthcare disparities, organizational and system level strategic planning and policy development geared towards promoting recovery oriented, person centered care, health equity, and cultural competence.

My goals as Commissioner include continued involvement with the recovery community and close relationships with our state agency partners for mutual benefit, as well as achievements in the areas of cultural competence, recovery oriented care and reductions in health disparities and discrimination against those with behavioral health challenges.

There are a number of challenging issues facing the Connecticut behavioral health system in the upcoming years. While DMHAS is a well-resourced agency there is always great need. The department must evolve to balance need with available resources. Connecticut is in the midst of a public health crisis related to opioids, both prescription drugs and heroin. The department must continue to promote prevention, utilizing best practices such as public education and overdose prevention through the widespread availability of Narcan, while ensuring treatment options for those struggling with addictions are readily accessible. Despite the increased conversation about mental illness that has occurred in our state over the recent past, people with substance abuse and mental health disorders continue to experience discrimination. The department must continue to work to combat stereotypes in order to ensure our clients have equal access to housing, employment and any other activity that provides a full life in recovery in their community of choice.

Fortunately DMHAS has access to tools and resources to overcome these and other obstacles. As Commissioner I will work to maximize these resources. One of these resources is the state agency partnerships DMHAS cultivated and will continue to grow. I am looking forward to working with colleagues from my sister state agencies, especially at the Office of Policy and Management, Judicial Branch and Departments of Correction, Housing, Children and Families, Developmental Services and Social Services. Our work together braids necessary services for our clients, diverting them from jail, transitioning them from one system to another, and ensuring they have access to adequate resources to live lives in recovery in the community. These partnerships will be one of the cornerstones for the success of initiatives such as the Second Chance Society and Zero: 2016.

I look forward to continuing to work with the approximately 150 private not-for-profit agencies with which we contract for services. They are integral partners in our treatment system. They have worked side by side with us in realigning service delivery to ensure that we can provide services that are both evidence-based and cost-effective.

I believe my experience's working at the federal level will assist the Department in maximizing federal resources. My understanding of the mission and vision of Health and Human Services will keep Connecticut on the forefront nationally on topics such as peer supports, behavioral health homes, behavioral health equity and access to recovery services.

The prospect of leading this unique and diverse agency is a wonderful opportunity to participate fully in the forward momentum of the system. I respectfully ask for your confirmation of my appointment so that I can build on the already great work that is occurring at the agency. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you have.